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through PBS' American Playhouse series.) Now, about ten years into the AIDS epidemic, several name directors have features in the works, including Jonathan Demme, who took a beating from gay activists for what many perceived to be a homophobic treatment of the serial killer character in *Silence of the Lambs.* (Maybe he hopes those same activists and critics will consider his next film "Atonement of the Lambs.")

What I would really like to know is this: why has Hollywood found it necessary to consider AIDS a controversial topic in the first place? To go further, why does the United States generally have such a paralyzing horror of sexual matters of any stripe? Don't take my word for it. Please note that films like *Terminator 2,* which graphically depict senseless maiming, dismemberment, impaling and murder, are regularly given the more accessible "R" rating, while films like *Poison,* which briefly glimpses an actor's penis, or *Henry and June,* are either slapped with the restrictive "NC-17" or go unrated because of their erotic content.

Which brings me back to that other old, old question: namely, would you rather have the Cinema show you how to have responsible, mutually pleasurable sex, or how to commit repugnant and meaningless acts of violence? So far, the answer, from both America and Hollywood, is a disconcerting one. ❖

BOOKS

Here To Dare: Ten Black Gay Poets

Edited by Assoto Saint

(Galiens Press, 1992)

Reviewed by Christopher Hewitt

Following the highly successful anthology *The Road Before Us* (1991 Lambda Literary Award) Assoto Saint has compiled and edited another volume of Black gay poets, *Here to Dare,* just out with Galiens Press. Whereas the previous volume included work by 100 poets, the new one focuses in more depth on only ten. In many ways *Here to Dare* is more compelling if less diverse. Now we have the opportunity to examine more closely the work of these poets and to appreciate the scope of each writer's work. The poets are Arthur T. Wilson, John D. Williams, Robert Westley, Harold McNeil Robinson, Craig A. Reynolds, Steve Langley, Cary Alan Johnson, David Warren Frechette, Don Charles and Djola Bernard Branner. Of these (innovatively placed in reverse alphabetical order in the book) the first five are by far the best. Their use of language is sophisticated and wide ranging — from "literary and lyrical" to simple, direct and almost accusatory; a good example of this diversity and richness of language can be seen in Arthur T. Wilson's "Cecil's Hot-Tongue Stream of Consciousness Poem," a memorial to Cecil, a homeless troubadour who lived for many years in Greenwich Village:

There are impelling planets in my mouth,
A lover-proof furnace in my soul...
Who threw the baby out with the trash?
And who stole my heart last year
While having a nervous breakdown
On the train?

This book is a celebration by gay Blacks of gay Blacks, but it's more than this. Several of the poems speak of interracial relationships and a touching poem by Djola Bernard Branner, "For Robert," thanks the late Robert Mapplethorpe for taking photos of his Black gay brothers.

There are also poems of defiance, of anger at racial "downputting" by the white establishment, for example, "New World Order," by Harold McNeil Robinson. "Basic Training," by Steve Langley, is a list of phallic symbols grunted out by a man doing pushups — a kind of "we're here and we're queer in the army" poem. Many of the poems directly addressing the AIDS crisis are defiant also; especially effective is "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien" by David Warren Frechette — a battle cry of freedom from, and to love in the face of, the disease.

Some of the poems addressing the loss and havoc wrought by AIDS are tender and touching, especially Robinson's "Love at a Distance," Robert Westley's "Hymn to Passion in Time of Plague," Cary Alan Johnson's "Numbers" and Craig A. Reynolds' "I Cannot Tell You," in which the poet addresses his lover who is dying from the disease.

There are love poems, raunchy sex poems, poems of the glimpse, the fleeting moment à la Cavafy — John D. Williams' "Private Poems" series is wonderful in this vein — and so much more. Read this book and find out the rest for yourself. ❖

Love At A Distance

For Wayne and Steven

by Harold McNeil Robinson

1.
So hard to give the love you want
So high the price
if we should disappear
just not be there
as absentee parents or previous lovers
Our thoughts coincide for a moment
like trains running briefly
on parallel tracks
Powers that pressure
engineer our submission
sacrifice suicidal
of a sex out of vogue
subdued underground
by recycled morals

2.
Love at a distance
seems so religious
A Black gay Messiah might be
fun to run over
locomoting to freedom, glory, and gold
He had called my attention
to swollen lymph nodes
shaking my hand stiffly
when he knew I'd undress him
after months of reflection
Talk and touch were taboo
silence seemed such a friend
Love at a distance
was so safe and secure
No need for unblocking
reservoirs of emotion

3.
Passing subway lights flicker
Windows run in reverse, stand still
move forward like silent movie frames
None of the passing flourescent faces
reminds me of you
My thoughts reel backward
to scenes of late summer
hotel crimes of passion near Rock Creek

Hew. H

(Galiens Press, 1992). Reviewing Christopher Hewitt (A&U)

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